

NOT FOR PUBLICATION

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
DISTRICT OF NEW JERSEY

SHAR-RIK MOLLEY,	:	
	:	
Plaintiff,	:	Civil Action No. 13-3811(NLH)
	:	:
v.	:	OPINION
	:	
CFG, et al.,	:	
	:	
Defendants.	:	

APPEARANCES:

Shar-Rik Molley
Atlantic County Justice Facility
5060 Atlantic Avenue
Mays Landing, NJ 08330
Plaintiff pro se

HILLMAN, District Judge

Plaintiff Shar-Rik Molley, a pre-trial detainee confined at Atlantic County Justice Facility in Mays Landing, New Jersey, seeks to bring this action in forma pauperis pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1983, alleging violations of his constitutional rights.¹

¹ This Court previously entered its Opinion and Order [2, 3] denying without prejudice Plaintiff's deficient application for leave to proceed in forma pauperis and administratively terminating this matter. Plaintiff has since submitted a complete Application [4] for leave to proceed in forma pauperis. Based on his affidavit of indigence and the absence of three qualifying dismissals within 28 U.S.C. § 1915(g), the Court will grant Plaintiff's application to proceed in forma pauperis pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(a) and will order the Clerk of the

At this time, the Court must review the Complaint to determine whether it should be dismissed as frivolous or malicious, for failure to state a claim upon which relief may be granted, or because it seeks monetary relief from a defendant who is immune from such relief. See 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2) (in forma pauperis actions); 28 U.S.C. § 1915A (actions in which prisoner seeks redress from a governmental defendant); 42 U.S.C. § 1997e (prisoner actions brought with respect to prison conditions).

I. BACKGROUND

The following factual allegations are taken from Plaintiff's Complaint and are accepted as true for purposes of this review.

Plaintiff alleges that he arrived at Atlantic County Justice Facility ("ACJF") from the hospital where he had been provided a sling and crutches for a sprain. He alleges that when he arrived at ACJF, Dr. Clemmons called him a "damn fool," and Dr. Cherly DeBoise took the sling and crutches from him and removed him from the medical facility to general population.

Plaintiff alleges that in general population he was not able to obtain ice for the swelling of his foot and that he was not able to elevate the foot as recommended. He also states

Court to re-open this action and file the Complaint.

that he has remained in pain and that he needs to see a foot doctor as the hospital suggested.

Plaintiff names as Defendants CFG, presumably a contracted medical provider for ACJF, Dr. Clemmons, and Dr. DeBoise.² Plaintiff seeks compensatory damages and further medical treatment.

II. STANDARDS FOR A SUA SPONTE DISMISSAL

Every complaint must comply with the pleading requirements of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

Rule 8(a)(2) requires that a complaint contain "a short and plain statement of the claim showing that the pleader is entitled to relief." "Specific facts are not necessary; the statement need only 'give the defendant fair notice of what the ... claim is and the grounds upon which it rests.'" Erickson v. Pardus, 551 U.S. 89, 93 (2007) (citations omitted).

While a complaint ... does not need detailed factual allegations, a plaintiff's obligation to provide the "grounds" of his "entitle[ment] to relief" requires more than labels and conclusions, and a formulaic recitation of the elements of a cause of action will not do Factual allegations must be enough to raise a right to relief above the speculative level
... .

Bell Atlantic Corp. v. Twombly, 550 U.S. 544, 555 (2007)

² Plaintiff also adds "et al" to the caption of the Complaint. In the text of the Complaint, he generally alleges that he has been "treated badly" by other medical staff. These vague allegations are not sufficient to state a claim against any other persons, as explained more fully, below.

(citations omitted). That is, a complaint must assert "enough facts to state a claim to relief that is plausible on its face." Id. at 570.

"A claim has facial plausibility when the plaintiff pleads factual content that allows the court to draw the reasonable inference that the defendant is liable for the misconduct alleged." Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. 662, 678 (2009) (citing Twombly, 550 U.S. at 556). Thus, a court is "not bound to accept as true a legal conclusion couched as a factual allegation," and "[t]hreadbare recitals of the elements of a cause of action, supported by mere conclusory statements, do not suffice." Ashcroft v. Iqbal, 556 U.S. at 678 (citations omitted).

To determine whether a complaint meets the pleading standard, our analysis unfolds in three steps. First, we outline the elements a plaintiff must plead to state a claim for relief. Next, we peel away those allegations that are no more than conclusions and thus not entitled to the assumption of truth. Finally, we look for well-pled factual allegations, assume their veracity, and then "determine whether they plausibly give rise to an entitlement to relief." This last step is "a context-specific task that requires the reviewing court to draw on its judicial experience and common sense."

Bistrrian v. Levi, 696 F.3d 352, 365 (3d Cir. 2012) (citations omitted).

In determining the sufficiency of a pro se complaint, the Court must be mindful to accept its factual allegations as true,

see James v. City of Wilkes-Barre, 700 F.3d 675, 679 (3d Cir. 2012), and to construe it liberally in favor of the plaintiff, see Haines v. Kerner, 404 U.S. 519, 520-21 (1972); United States v. Day, 969 F.2d 39, 42 (3d Cir. 1992).

Where a complaint can be remedied by an amendment, a district court may not dismiss the complaint with prejudice, but must permit the amendment. Denton v. Hernandez, 504 U.S. 25, 34 (1992); Grayson v. Mayview State Hospital, 293 F.3d 103, 108 (3d Cir. 2002) (dismissal pursuant to 28 U.S.C. § 1915(e)(2)), cited in Thomaston v. Meyer, 519 F.App'x 118, 120 n.2 (3d Cir. 2013); Shane v. Fauver, 213 F.3d 113, 116-17 (3d Cir. 2000) (dismissal pursuant to 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c)(1)); Urrutia v. Harrisburg County Police Dept., 91 F.3d 451, 453 (3d Cir. 1996).

III. SECTION 1983 ACTIONS

A plaintiff may have a cause of action under 42 U.S.C. § 1983 for certain violations of his constitutional rights. Section 1983 provides in relevant part:

Every person who, under color of any statute, ordinance, regulation, custom, or usage, of any State or Territory ... subjects, or causes to be subjected, any citizen of the United States or other person within the jurisdiction thereof to the deprivation of any rights, privileges, or immunities secured by the Constitution and laws, shall be liable to the party injured in an action at law, suit in equity, or other proper proceeding for redress

Thus, to state a claim for relief under § 1983, a plaintiff must allege, first, the violation of a right secured by the

Constitution or laws of the United States and, second, that the alleged deprivation was committed or caused by a person acting under color of state law. West v. Atkins, 487 U.S. 42, 48 (1988); Malleus v. George, 641 F.3d 560, 563 (3d Cir. 2011).

IV. ANALYSIS

A. The Claim Against Dr. DeBoise

Plaintiff alleges that Dr. DeBoise took from him crutches and a sling provided by the hospital where he had been treated before his incarceration, and that she removed him from the medical facility and returned him to general population. He alleges that these actions interrupted his treatment and subjected him to continuing pain and injury.

Criminal pretrial detainees retain liberty interests firmly grounded in the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment. See Hubbard v. Taylor, 399 F.3d 150 (3d Cir. 2005); Fuentes v. Wagner, 206 F.3d 335, 341 (3d Cir. 2000). Analysis of whether such a detainee has been deprived of liberty without due process is governed by the standards set out by the Supreme Court in Bell v. Wolfish, 441 U.S. 520 (1979). Hubbard, 399 F.3d at 157-60, 164-67; Fuentes, 206 F.3d at 341-42.

In evaluating the constitutionality of conditions or restrictions of pretrial detention that implicate only the protection against deprivation of liberty without due process of law, we think that the proper inquiry is whether those conditions amount to punishment of the detainee. ...

Not every disability imposed during pretrial detention amounts to punishment in the constitutional sense, however. ...

A court must decide whether the disability is imposed for the purpose of punishment or whether it is but an incident of some other legitimate governmental purpose. Absent a showing of an expressed intent to punish on the part of detention facility officials, that determination generally will turn on whether an alternative purpose to which [the restriction] may rationally be connected is assignable for it, and whether it appears excessive in relation to the alternative purpose assigned [to it]. Thus, if a particular condition or restriction of pretrial detention is reasonably related to a legitimate governmental objective, it does not, without more, amount to punishment. Conversely, if a restriction or condition is not reasonably related to a legitimate goal--if it is arbitrary or purposeless--a court permissibly may infer that the purpose of the governmental action is punishment that may not constitutionally be inflicted upon detainees qua detainees. ...

441 U.S. at 535-39 (citations omitted). The Court further explained that the government has legitimate interests that stem from its need to maintain security and order at the detention facility. "Restraints that are reasonably related to the institutions interest in maintaining jail security do not, without more, constitute unconstitutional punishment, even if they are discomforting and are restrictions that the detainee would not have experienced had he been released while awaiting trial." 441 U.S. at 540. Retribution and deterrence, however, are not legitimate nonpunitive governmental objectives, 441 U.S. at 539 n.20, nor are grossly exaggerated responses to genuine

security considerations. Id. at 539 n.20, 561-62.

Moreover, the due process rights of a pretrial detainee, to medical care, are "at least as great as the Eighth Amendment protections available to a convicted prisoner." City of Revere v. Massachusetts General Hosp., 463 U.S. 239, 244-45 (1983) (citing, inter alia, Bell v. Wolfish). The Eighth Amendment proscription against cruel and unusual punishment is violated when prison officials are deliberately indifferent³ to a prisoner's serious medical needs.⁴ Estelle v. Gamble, 429 U.S. 97, 103-04 (1976). "Where prison authorities deny reasonable requests for medical treatment, ... and such denial exposes the inmate to undue suffering or the threat of tangible residual injury, deliberate indifference is manifest. Similarly, where 'knowledge of the need for medical care [is accompanied by the] ... intentional refusal to provide that care,' the deliberate indifference standard has been met. ... Finally, deliberate indifference is demonstrated '[w]hen ... prison authorities

³ "Deliberate indifference" is more than mere malpractice or negligence; it is a state of mind equivalent to reckless disregard of a known risk of harm. Farmer v. Brennan, 511 U.S. 825, 837-38 (1994).

⁴ Serious medical needs include those that have been diagnosed by a physician as requiring treatment or that are so obvious that a lay person would recognize the necessity for a doctor's attention, and those conditions which, if untreated, would result in lifelong handicap or permanent loss. Monmouth County Correctional Institutional Inmates v. Lanzaro, 834 F.2d 326, 347 (3d Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 486 U.S. 1006 (1988).

prevent an inmate from receiving recommended treatment for serious medical needs or deny access to a physician capable of evaluating the need for such treatment.'" Monmouth County Corr. Inst. Inmates v. Lanzaro, 834 F.2d 326, 346-47 (3d Cir. 1987), cert. denied, 486 U.S. 1006 (1988) (citations omitted). "Short of absolute denial, if necessary medical treatment [i]s ... delayed for non-medical reasons, a case of deliberate indifference has been made out." Id. (citations omitted). "Deliberate indifference is also evident where prison officials erect arbitrary and burdensome procedures that result[] in interminable delays and outright denials of medical care to suffering inmates." Id. at 347 (citation omitted).

A prisoner's subjective dissatisfaction with his medical care, however, does not in itself indicate deliberate indifference. Andrews v. Camden County, 95 F.Supp.2d 217, 228 (D.N.J. 2000); Peterson v. Davis, 551 F.Supp. 137, 145 (D. Md. 1982), aff'd, 729 F.2d 1453 (4th Cir. 1984). Similarly, mere disagreements over medical judgment do not state Eighth Amendment claims. White v. Napoleon, 897 F.2d 103, 110 (3d Cir. 1990).

Beyond these parameters, the Court of Appeals for the Third Circuit has not delineated the standard applicable to claims that denial or inadequacy of medical care violates a detainee's right to due process. See, e.g., Carson v. Mulvihill, 488

F.App'x 554, 561 (3d Cir. 2012) ("We need not resolve today which standard [Bell or Estelle] applies."); King v. County of Gloucester, 302 F.App'x 92, 95 (3d Cir. 2008) ("In assessing the denial of medical care to a pretrial detainee, ... [the] inquiry involves an indirect application of the Eighth Amendment deliberate indifference standard.").

Here, Plaintiff's allegations that he had some kind of sprain and that Dr. DeBoise took away crutches and a sling provided to him at the hospital, while returning him to general population where he could not "ice" or elevate his foot, and while failing to provide any further treatment, subjecting him to continuing pain and injury, are sufficient to survive dismissal at this screening stage. Cf. Hemmings v. Gorczyk, 134 F.3d 104 (2d Cir. 1998).

B. The Claims Against Dr. Clemmons and Other Staff

The only allegation against Dr. Clemmons is that he called Plaintiff a "fool." This allegation of name-calling is plainly insufficient to state a claim for unconstitutional denial of medical care or violation of any other constitutional right. See, e.g., Brown v. Hamilton Police Dept., Civil No. 13-0260, 2013 WL 3189040, *2 (D.N.J. June 21, 2013) (verbal harassment) (collecting cases); Barber v. Jones, Civil No. 12-2578, 2013 WL 211251, *4-*6 (D.N.J. Jan. 18, 2013) (verbal harassment) (collecting cases). Accordingly, this claim will be dismissed

with prejudice.

In addition, Plaintiff makes a vague "et al," designation in the caption of the Complaint, failing to identify the individuals to whom that characterization is intended to apply, either by name or action. The vague allegations regarding other individuals contained in the text of the Complaint -- for example, that Plaintiff has been treated unprofessionally by the entire staff -- are plainly insufficient to raise above the speculative level any claim that any particular person was deliberately indifferent to Plaintiff's serious medical needs or otherwise violated any constitutional right. Accordingly, all claims against unnamed defendants will be dismissed without prejudice.

C. The Claim Against CFG

It is well established that local government units and supervisors are not liable under § 1983 solely on a theory of respondeat superior. See City of Oklahoma City v. Tuttle, 471 U.S. 808, 824 n.8 (1985); Monell v. New York City Department of Social Services, 436 U.S. 658, 690-91, 694 (1978) (municipal liability attaches only "when execution of a government's policy or custom, whether made by its lawmakers or by those whose edicts or acts may fairly be said to represent official policy, inflicts the injury" complained of); Natale v. Camden County Correctional Facility, 318 F.3d 575, 583-84 (3d Cir. 2003). "A

defendant in a civil rights action must have personal involvement in the alleged wrongs, liability cannot be predicated solely on the operation of respondeat superior. Personal involvement can be shown through allegations of personal direction or of actual knowledge and acquiescence." Rode v. Dellarciprete, 845 F.2d 1195, 1207 (3d Cir. 1988) (citations omitted). Accord Robinson v. City of Pittsburgh, 120 F.3d 1286, 1293-96 (3d Cir. 1997); Baker v. Monroe Twp., 50 F.3d 1186, 1190-91 (3d Cir. 1995).

To establish liability of a municipality or government agency under § 1983, "a plaintiff must show that an official who has the power to make policy is responsible for either the affirmative proclamation of a policy or acquiescence in a well-settled custom." Bielewicz v. Dubinon, 915 F.2d 845, 850 (3d Cir. 1990), quoted in Blanche Rd. Corp. v. Bensalem Twp., 57 F.3d 253, 269 n.16 (3d Cir.), cert. denied, 516 U.S. 915 (1995), and quoted in Woodwind Estates, Ltd. v. Gretkowski, 205 F.3d 118, 126 (3d Cir. 2000). A plaintiff must demonstrate that, through its deliberate conduct, the municipality was the moving force behind the plaintiff's injury. Monell, 436 U.S. at 689.

A policy is made "when a decisionmaker possess[ing] final authority to establish municipal policy with respect to the action issues a final proclamation, policy or edict." Mulholland v. Government County of Berks, Pa., 706 F.3d 227, 237

(3d Cir. 2013) (citations and internal quotation marks omitted).

A custom is an act "that has not been formally approved by an appropriate decisionmaker," but that is "so widespread as to have the force of law." Bd. of County Comm'rs of Bryan County, Oklahoma v. Brown, 520 U.S. 397, 404 (1997).

There are three situations where acts of a government employee may be deemed to be the result of a policy or custom of the governmental entity for whom the employee works, thereby rendering the entity liable under § 1983. The first is where "the appropriate officer or entity promulgates a generally applicable statement of policy and the subsequent act complained of is simply an implementation of that policy." The second occurs where "no rule has been announced as policy but federal law has been violated by an act of the policymaker itself." Finally, a policy or custom may also exist where "the policymaker has failed to act affirmatively at all, [though] the need to take some action to control the agents of the government 'is so obvious, and the inadequacy of existing practice so likely to result in the violation of constitutional rights, that the policymaker can reasonably be said to have been deliberately indifferent to the need.'"

Natale, 318 F.3d at 584 (footnote and citations omitted). The same standard applies to claims against a private corporation that is functioning as a "state actor." See Weigher v. Prison Health Services, 402 F.App'x 668, 669-70 (3d Cir. 2010).

Here, to the extent CFG could be considered a "state actor," Plaintiff has alleged no facts suggesting that the decisions to remove his crutches and sling and return him to the general population were the result of an actionable policy or practice on the part of CFG. Accordingly, all claims against

CFG will be dismissed without prejudice for failure to state a claim.

V. CONCLUSION

For the reasons set forth above, the Fourteenth Amendment medical-care claim may proceed as against Dr. Deboise. All remaining claims will be dismissed, pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §§ 1915(e)(2)(B)(ii) and 1915A(b)(1) and 42 U.S.C. § 1997e(c), for failure to state a claim. However, because it is conceivable that Plaintiff may be able to supplement his pleading with facts sufficient to overcome the deficiencies described above, the Court will grant Plaintiff leave to file an application to re-open accompanied by a proposed amended complaint.⁵ An appropriate order follows.

At Camden, New Jersey

s/Noel L. Hillman
Noel L. Hillman
United States District Judge

Dated: June 24, 2014

⁵ Plaintiff should note that when an amended complaint is filed, it supersedes the original and renders it of no legal effect, unless the amended complaint specifically refers to or adopts the earlier pleading. See West Run Student Housing Associates, LLC v. Huntington National Bank, 712 F.3d 165, 171 (3d Cir. 2013) (collecting cases). See also 6 Charles Alan Wright & Arthur R. Miller, Federal Practice and Procedure § 1476 (3d ed. 2008). To avoid confusion, the safer practice is to submit an amended complaint that is complete in itself. Id.